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# From Abominable to Zealous

## A comparison of British usage guides from the early 20th century till today

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**Title**: *From Abominable to Zealous: A comparison of British usage guides from the early 20th century till today.*

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to examine the views on linguistic phenomena which have been criticised during the past century. The material used is six British usage guides published between 1906 and 2010 in which five controversial points of usage are selected for study. They are: *between you and I* (instead of *me*), split infinitives, the placement of *only* in a sentence, singular *none*, and *different(ly) to/than* (instead of *from*). The attitudes to these phenomena are analysed and compared. The analysis is focused on the language used by the authors and descriptive and prescriptive elements displayed in the guides. The results show that although there are differences between the usage guides, there is no clearly distinct trend in diachronic changes of attitudes within the studied period. However, some points of usage are approached with uniform attitudes by all the guides. The character of descriptive discourse does not seem to change in one direction across the century under study, but observable contrasts in recent discussions on the controversial issues of usage point to the possibility of a new wave of prescriptivism.

**Keywords**: Usage guides, stigmatised language, diachronic change, prescriptivism, descriptivism, linguistic prestige, attitudes to correctness.

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# 1. Introduction

The topic of what is to be considered proper language often sparks heated debates, and passionate arguments are held over grammar, spelling and punctuation. These issues are ardently debated in newspaper columns, letters to the editor, and internet forums, as well as in bestselling books. Far from being just nit picking and pundits arguing with pundits, this phenomenon is interesting from several perspectives.

Although there has been a somewhat strained relationship between linguists and advocates of linguistic prescriptivism, prescriptivism as an area of language usage and language codification should not be ignored. As Cameron (1995: xi) points out, failing to recognise prescriptive ideas because they clash with the descriptive philosophy, is not actually having a descriptive approach. Prescriptive ideas are a part of our culture and contribute to the shaping of language as any other cultural aspect does. Additionally, Cameron (1995: 18) argues, if prescriptive schemes had no effect on language, or were not feared to have any effect, they would not be opposed to the extent that they are.

The fear can certainly be justified. Pullum (2014: 17) states that the well-known recommendations on how passives should be avoided "has contributed to what is now an epidemic level of confusion among educated Americans". He further describes this as "[t]he blind warning the blind about a non-existent danger" (p. 21).

With regards to this, how can this area of language be studied, and what can be discovered from these studies? Firstly, they may reflect other views present in society. Moral and social values are readily attached to language users who follow or break certain grammatical or stylistic rules. Similarly, there are positive and negative prejudices towards certain dialects and sociolects. A current example of this is the hostility towards African American Vernacular English, AAVE, and speakers of the dialect are sometimes labelled as ignorant or unable to speak properly (Lynch 2009: 264-269).

Secondly, from a diachronic perspective, such studies could provide a possibility of observing ongoing language changes through the recommendations of prescriptive texts. A change in attitude towards certain phenomena may not only reflect the view which some part of society has on those phenomena, but it can also serve as an indication of a language change in process.

Lastly, language critique and opinions on language are important in themselves. These opinions reflect how we view our language. Notwithstanding the bias, they provide clear

examples of our linguistic reflexivity. From a broader perspective, studies of language critique provide insight into the nature of our attitudes and thoughts about language.

### 1.1 Aim

Grammatical prescriptions might give the impression of representing a non-changing set of rules and attitudes, some of them having been present in usage guides for centuries. The aim of this essay is to reveal diachronic changes in the presentation of well-known linguistic precepts across a century. Furthermore, I aim to analyse the discourse of these precepts in order to observe developments towards more prescriptive or descriptive attitudes to features of English grammar.

### 1.2 Definitions

This essay discusses linguistic *precepts*. A precept refers to a collection of authoritative opinions regarding a point of language usage. For example, the opinions on whether one may end a sentence with a preposition constitutes a precept. Additionally, the terms *prescriptive* and *descriptive* are central for this essay. A prescriptive view on language refers to the structure of a language as certain people think it should be used. These people are called prescriptivists. A set of rules formulated by prescriptivists are usually intended as an aid to the learning of that language. Conversely, a descriptive view on language aims at describing language objectively, as it is actually used by speakers and writers. Advocates of this view (descriptivism) are called descriptivists; they do not lay out rules about what may be considered “correct” or “incorrect” use of language.

## 2. Background

Prescriptivism in English has a rather long history. Texts with opinions on what constitutes proper language have been found to predate the Norman Conquest (Crystal 2006: 1). However, in order for a standard language to emerge, thus enabling rules being set on how this standard is to be defined, the invention of the printing press was crucial. Hence, guides about spelling and grammar started appearing about a hundred years after this invention, in the 16$^{th}$ century (Crystal 2006: 15-28). However, it was during the 18$^{th}$ century that guides of

this kind started to become bestsellers (Crystal 2006: 107-108).

During this time, conduct manuals of manners and language became popular. These were aimed at the newly formed aspiring middle classes who wished to imitate the social elite. Certain grammatical rules were thus based on imitations of the aristocratic language, writes Lynch (2009: 39-45). He states that "what began as a mere preference of fashion – an attempt to sound like social superiors – eventually became codified as a law" Lynch (2009: 45). These grammars and manuals had an enormous impact on the English language. In 1762, Robert Lowth published *A Short Introduction to English Grammar,* which had gone into 45 editions by the year 1800. It inspired the even more famous *English Grammar,* written by Lindley Murray and published in 1795, a book which came to influence grammar teaching up until the 1950s (Crystal 2006: 107-109).

During the time of these publications, Latin had been an important language in England for more than a thousand years. Hence, early prescriptive ideas were to a great extent affected by Latin and the high status ascribed to it. Aitchison (2013: 10-12) says that "people felt that there ought to be a fixed 'correct' form for any language, including English", and English was seen as less pure than Latin. Additionally, Latin was primarily written and read, and this contributed to the idea of written language being superior to spoken language. With Latin seen as a model, proscriptions were established against grammatical constructions different to those of Latin (Aitchison 2013: 10-12).

One such rule was against ending a sentence with a preposition. This rule was formulated by Dryden in the late 17th century and likely based on the admiration of Latin. In the following century, it became well known due to the popular grammars and instructions on language usage. This rule, Crystal says, suited the prescriptivists of the time very well (2006: 110-115). They in fact wanted rules which could clearly distinguish between formal and colloquial language. This shows both the impact a single person can have on language usage, as well as raises the question of to what extent we are affected by rules created solely as an indicator of register.

In spite of the admiration for Latin, however, a recurring view is that the English language has a far too high amount of Latin or French words in its lexicon, and that Romance words are to be avoided in favour of Germanic. This recommendation has been present from the 16th century guides to the texts of George Orwell in the 20th century (Crystal 2006: 39-40).

Throughout the history of language prescriptions, the notion that moral values are attached to language use has also been present. Usage which breaks certain rules has been

associated not only with a deteriorating language, but with a deteriorating society as a whole. People who use proscribed linguistic features can be seen as a symptom of other issues in society, such as criminality, and speakers of regional dialects have been ascribed certain negative traits as well. This had not always been the case, but started rather in the 16th century (Crystal 2006: 49-54; Cameron 1995: 94).

However, opinions on what constitutes prestigious linguistic features have varied. Thus, the omission of the final /g/ in words such as 'hunting' was in the 18th century a trait associated with the social elite, while it is not regarded as a prestige feature of speech today. Similarly, prior to the emergence of what was to become modern RP, the dropping of the /r/ following a vowel in words such as 'farm' was not seen as prestigious. Today, however, it is regarded as the standard (Crystal 2006: 178-9). Varying trends and disagreements have hence also existed within the prescriptive community. Language critics were criticising earlier opinions and were themselves criticised by the following generations: "Dryden and Defoe castigate the usage of Johnson and Shakespeare. Swift castigates the usage of Johnson and Defoe. And in due course, as we shall see, eighteenth century prescriptive grammarians castigate Swift for carelessness" (Crystal 2006: 72).

As stated in the introduction, thoughts on prescriptivism and descriptivism are still discussed today. An interesting example of this debate is found in *The Telegraph*, which recently published an article titled "Are 'grammar Nazis' ruining the English language?" (Chivers 2014, online), which was based on Geoffrey Pullum's debunking of several prescriptive ideas. Some time later, the same newspaper published a compilation of pictures of signs sent in by readers, titled "Bad grammar spotted by readers" (*The Telegraph* [online]). This was accompanied by the text "Linguist Geoffrey Pullum has accused grammar pedants of ruining the English language, but there's simply no excuse for these monstrosities, each spotted by Telegraph Travel readers...". Two very different approaches to language, presented by the same newspaper.

## 2.1 Previous research

A significant project currently in process is *Bridging the Unbridgeable*, led by Prof. Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade at Leiden University. It aims to "close the gap between the three main players in the field of prescriptivism: the linguists themselves, the prescriptivists (as writers of usage guides) and those who depend upon such manuals" and will be finished in 2016 (Leiden University, online). A subproject of this is the *Hyper Usage Guide of English*,

or HUGE, database: an extensive compilation of usage guides published from 1770 onwards (*Bridging the Unbridgeable*, online). This, I believe, could facilitate future research on prescriptivism significantly.

A report already published as part of the project is *Studying attitudes to English usage* (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2013), which compares acceptance of a small sample of controversial linguistic constructions. The report is a modern continuation of the study *Attitudes to English* by Mittins et al. (1970), which (using a slightly different approach) compared the acceptance of 55 linguistic constructions. Both studies provide an insight in people's opinions regarding stigmatised points of usage.

A comprehensive discussion about causes and consequences of modern prescriptivism is presented in *Authorities in Language* (Milroy and Milroy 1999). This includes language based discrimination and behaviours related to prestige, which proved to be an important input in the discussion on social factors surrounding prescriptions in this study.

Geoffrey Pullum has written a number of papers also on the topic of modern prescriptivism, including *Fear and loathing of the English passive* (2014) and *Ideology, Power, and Linguistic Theory* (2006). The former studies the misguided precept against the passive construction and describes how a linguistic recommendation can be established on grammatically ungrounded basis and without regards to usage. The latter discusses the causes of prescriptivism. Pullum's discussions have presented interesting theories on the motives behind prescriptions.

Naturally, research concerning older precepts and prescriptive ideas is more abundant than that concerning more recent precepts. One noteworthy example is *A Dictionary of English Normative Grammar* 1700-1800 by Sundby, Kari Bjørge and Haugland which is a comprehensive dictionary over all grammatical prescriptions of 18th century grammar books (1991). The book has proven a highly useful source for comparing early prescriptions with those discussed in this study.

## 3. Method and Material

The present study compares the approaches and attitudes towards certain linguistic phenomena displayed in British usage guides published between 1906 and 2010. Usage guides were chosen as the main source for this study as they are authoritative publications able to exert a great influence on language users. They also provide a comprehensive and

elaborate coverage of several linguistic phenomena. Although material from internet message boards or newspaper columns could have proved interesting sources, some difficulties arise regarding the selection and gathering of these types of data. The accumulation of a sufficient amount of material to be representative for a general trend rather than single arbitrary opinions, as well as the assessment of what is to be perceived as valid data, would likely prove a task exceeding the limitations of this essay. These types of data also lack the authority of published usage guides.

As the aim of the study is to analyse prescriptivism over time, only usage guides published in one country, the United Kingdom, were chosen as sources. Usage guides from different countries would render an analysis of diachronic trends more difficult due to the factor of regional preferences. The UK was chosen on the basis of having the longest history of English prescriptivism. Six usage guides of different kinds have been chosen for this study. They are dictionaries composed of entries presented alphabetically and style books written as a continuous text divided into chapters:

- Henry Watson Fowler; Francis George Fowler. *The King's English.* 1906
- Henry Watson Fowler. *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage.* 1926
- Eric Partridge. *Usage and Abusage.* First published 1947, last revised 1957
- Ernest Gowers. *The Complete Plain Words.* First published 1954, reprinted 1963
- Pam Peters. *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage.* 2004
- Simon Heffer. *Strictly English: the correct way to write and why it matters*. 2010

They are abbreviated in this essay as *King's*, *Modern*, *Usage*, *Complete Plain*, *Cambridge* and *Strictly*, respectively.

The selection of phenomena analysed in the study is based on a list of the ten most common complaints on points of grammatical usage. The list is the result of a survey of letters received from listeners to the BBC Radio 4 series *English Now* in 1986 and was published in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of English Language* (Crystal 2003: 194). Compiled from over a thousand letters, the list provides an indication of what people are most conscious and concerned about and was thus chosen as a point of departure for this study.

From this list, the top five items were chosen as a benchmark. Different attitudes conveyed in the usage guides towards these linguistic features were then compared. The list in its entirety consists of ten items, but with regards to the limitations of this study, only the top five items were considered. As published by Crystal (2003: 194), these items are:

1. *I* should not be used in *between you and I;* the pronoun should be *me* after a preposition, as in *Give it to me.*
2. Split infinitives should not be used.
3. *Only* should be next to the word which it relates. People should not say *I only saw Jane* when they mean *I saw only Jane*.
4. *None* should never be followed by a plural verb. It should be *None was left on the table*, not *None were left on the table*.
5. *Different(ly)* should be followed by *from* and not by *to* or *than*.

The entries regarding these phenomena were used as material for this study. Several passages relating to the same phenomenon were considered to establish a full picture of the authors' views. A quote which the author uses to illustrate his own views is studied as representative of the view that guide conveys. All source material with page references is found in the Appendix. Thus, references to shorter quotations will not be given when it is evident from which source they are taken.

The study aims to relate a historical perspective up to the present day, which explains why the time span from 1906 till today was chosen. Guides published relatively recently have a higher probability of still being used, thus affecting present-day language users directly. Additionally, the fact that English has changed over the course of several hundred years is generally accepted. Short term change, however, is less obvious. Thus, in the conservative context of prescriptivism, possible changes in a relatively short and recent timespan would be interesting to observe.

# 4. Results

## 4.1 Definitions

The linguistic features which the complaints address are here labelled as *phenomena*. The prescriptions against the use of these phenomena are labelled *rules*.

Emotional aspects and approaches of the guides are given much attention. These include words or expressions which display personal feelings, or bias, that the authors might harbour towards the phenomena or rules. Hence, a passage described as containing "strong emotional language" does not contain taboo words, but words which carry much evaluative, emotional or judgemental weight.

## 4.2 Analysis of attitudes towards the rules

### 4.2.1 *Between you and I/me*

Despite being the top item on Crystal's list, the issue has not received much attention compared to other complaints. Some usage guides write fairly shortly regarding the matter and few emotional words are used in discussing it. However, the opinions regarding the complaint are relatively similar throughout the sources, and most seem to be in favour of the rule, albeit with slightly differing approaches. It is described as "a bad blunder" (*King's*), "false grammar not sanctioned" (*Modern*), "misused" (*Usage*), "a blunder" (*Complete Plain*), "a shibboleth […] to be avoided in writing" (*Cambridge*), and "barbaric" and "solecism" (*Strictly*). Worth noting is that the harshest words against it come from the most recent source.

### 4.2.2 The split infinitive

This complaint has been given much attention throughout the period. Long entries are devoted to the issue, and many emotional words are used when discussing it. *Cambridge*, which is the least emotive of the usage guides under study, states that 18th and 19th-century grammarians' "censure cast long shadows into [the 20th century]", that there is "little virtue" in avoiding the split infinitive "clumsily". The phrase "knee-jerk reaction of [19th century] pedagogues" is also unusually emotive for that book. Remarkably, this rule alone is objected to by every usage guide. Even *Strictly*, which is in favour of the four other rules, calls it a "popular obsession" and "dubious precept". Thus, despite the unanimous objection to the rule presented in the four guides published before Crystal's list, the split infinitive takes the place as the second most complained about language phenomenon.

Worth noting here is the manner in which the rule is dismissed. *King's* calls it a "curious superstition". *Modern* describes followers of the rule as "bogy-haunted creatures", "deaf to the normal rhythm of English sentences", and when describing the rule and its consequences uses words such as "disaster", "distortion", "abnormal" and "tyranny". *Complete Plain* calls it a "bad rule", "taboo", "fetish", and "malady".

### 4.2.3 The placement of *only*

This rule displays a lack of consistency between the different usage guides. It goes unmentioned in *King's*, but is objected to in a highly emotionally strong language in *Modern*, which is peculiar, considering the fact that these usage guides are partly written by the same author. *Modern* says, among other things, that those who strictly uphold this rule are "precisians" and "pedants" and describes them in the following colourful language: "if they are not quite botanizing upon their mother's grave, they are at least clapping a straight waistcoat upon their mother tongue".

*Usage* conveys a strictly prescriptive approach. It dismisses the argument that the rule is often broken by good writers and asks if we are "to sacrifice lucidity and clarity and the subtle employment of nuance to the sacred cause of carelessness?"

*Complete Plain* presents some advantages of the rule as the "irresponsible behaviour of *only* does sometimes create real ambiguity", but mainly argues "not [to] take the *only*-snoopers too seriously".

*Cambridge* does not label any variant of this language feature as right or wrong and presents a descriptive account of how the placement may change the meaning of the sentence, adding that because of intonation, placement is less important in speech.

*Strictly* approves of the rule, though without the emotion displayed in *Usage*. It simply states how the author thinks *only* should be used, which is in accordance with the criticism manifest in this rule.

### 4.2.4 Singular *none*

This rule is objected to by four of the usage guides and not mentioned in *King's*. The other book by Fowler, *Modern*, only devotes two lines to the issue. The only usage guide which is against the phenomenon is *Strictly*. Hence, the situation is similar to that of the split infinitive: three of the four guides published prior to Crystal's list object to the rule (*Usage* does so very forcefully), and the fourth does not mention it. Despite this, violation of the singular *none* rule takes the fourth place as the most complained about feature of usage.

Similar to *between you and I/me*¸ it is not described in emotional language, with the exception of *Usage*. This is, however, much due to the fact that the entry on the singular *none* rule includes a letter to the author chiding him for his somewhat snobbish attitude towards the matter. Nevertheless, as Partridge reproduced this letter in his book, saying he agrees with its content, this is to be regarded as the view *Usage* conveys.

### 4.2.5 *Different from/to/than*

This rule displays a very wide range of opinions, without any suggestion of a trend of opinions changing in one direction. On the contrary, variation is seemingly arbitrary. Sorted from the strongest opinion against the rule to the strongest opinion in favour of the rule, the results are the following:

- *Modern* (1926) uses a very strong emotional language against the rule. It is described as a "hasty & ill-defined generalisation" and a "SUPERSTITION"[sic!].
- *Cambridge* (2004) is neutrally stating that the arguments for the rule are "no longer powerful", and presents a thorough descriptive account of the different uses.
- *Complete Plain* (1963) describes the present usage situation in a neutral tone but states however that *different than* is "condemned by the grammarians".
- *King's* (1906) states that "*different to* is regarded by many newspaper editors and others in authority as a solecism, and is therefore better avoided". At the same time, it presents examples of how the usage of both *from* and *to* can be advantageous and disadvantageous.
- *Usage* (1957) presents *different from* as "impeccably correct" but *different to* is said to be "permissible".
- *Strictly* (2010) uses a strong emotional language against breaking the rule. It states that "mistakes" with prepositions "are often made when a demotic usage seeps into the consciousness of supposedly educated people", that *different to* or *than* are "abominable", and that *than,* in particular, is "an abomination".

## 4.3 Analysis of the discourse of the usage guides: descriptive versus prescriptive.

### 4.3.1 *The King's English*

Because the material from *King's* only consists of three rather short entries, it is hard to accurately judge its descriptive and prescriptive qualities. It is fairly neutral in its tone and does not argue vehemently for or against any rule or phenomena. Still, the opinions of the authors are presented as well, as in this extract from its entry on *different from/to/than*:

> There is no essential reason whatever why either set should not be as well followed by *to* as by *from.* But *different to* is regarded by many newspaper editors and others in authority as a solecism, and is therefore better avoided by those to whom the approval of such authorities is important. It is undoubtedly gaining ground […]. (Fowler; Fowler 1906: 162)

Interestingly, the style in *Cambridge*'s entry on *between you and I/me*, published almost a hundred years later, is rather similar to that of this quote. *King's* uses plenty of examples of usage in all three entries (see Appendix for passages in full), although the examples are often accompanied by some sort of evaluative judgement, which makes the tone more prescriptive.

### 4.3.2 *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*

This source provides some purely descriptive statements, such as: "the OED explicitly states that pl. construction is commoner."(Fowler 1926: 381), "[n]ot only is *to* 'found in writers of all ages' (OED)" (Fowler 1926: 113) and "[t]his does not imply that *d. from* is wrong; on the contrary, it is 'now usual' (OED)" (Fowler 1926: 114). Additionally, some fairly neutral speculations on causes of usage occur: "*[between] you & I*, which is often said, perhaps results from a hazy remembrance of hearing *you & me* corrected in the subjunctive."

However, the dictionary also contains a number of biased opinions and analyses which are not neutral in tone, as in this passage on *different from/to/than*: "a SUPERSTITION [sic!], a hasty & ill-defined generalisation, but it is only so owing to the dead set made against *d. to* by mistaken critics". A clear example of this duality between a neutral and personal tone is found in the entry on the placement of *only*. On the one hand, *Modern* provides an explanation of how the stress affects the meaning in speech and contributes to perspicuity:

> Remember that in speech there is not even the possibility of misunderstanding, because the intonation of *died* is entirely different if it, & not *a week ago*, is qualified by *only* ;
> The OED remarks on the point should be given : '*Only* was formerly often placed away from the word or words which it limited ; this is still frequent in speech, where the stress & pause prevent ambiguity, but is now avoided by perspicuous writers' (Fowler 1926: 405)

On the other hand, the same entry presents a highly emotional description of how Fowler views the advocates of the rule; he states, among other things, that "if they are not quite botanizing upon their mother's grave, they are at least clapping a straight waistcoat upon their mother tongue[…]". This ambivalence in discourse lowers the credibility of the more neutral statements concerning this rule. In the famous entry on the split infinitive, this duality is clearly seen. What could be seen as a descriptive account of usage and attitudes towards the phenomenon is presented in a highly personal and evaluative tone.

> "Those who neither know nor care are the vast majority, & are a happy folk, they see no reason why they should not say it (small blame to them, seeing that reasons are not their critics' strong point)" (Fowler 1926: 558)

> "These people betray by their practice that their aversion to the split infinitive springs not from instinctive good taste, but from tame acceptance of the misinterpreted opinion of others" (Fowler 1926: 558)

> "he may be doing it unconsciously as a member of our class 1, or he may be deliberately rejecting the trammels of convention […] but […] it is perhaps fair to assume that each specimen is a manifesto of independence" (Fowler 1926: 559-560)

These are observations on relevant aspects of usage: how common it is, why it is used, and how prestige affects the usage. Yet, the evaluative tone of the author makes these observations sound as personal judgements.

### 4.3.3 *Usage and Abusage*

This source displays, though not as distinctly as *Modern*, a duality of descriptive and prescriptive tendencies. Thus, it says about the *between you and I*-construction, that even though it is "indefensible grammatically, [it] may be regarded as a sense construction, and is often used by those who would never dream of saying *between he and I*". Notice the labelling of it as a *sense construction*, under the heading of which the author writes "[w]here sense-construction is idiom, it is folly and presumption to meddle with it" (Partridge 1957: 278), which strikes the reader as a descriptive view, although the phrase "indefensible grammatically" gives an impression that the author may think otherwise.

The approach to the placement of *only* is perhaps the least descriptive compared to other entries as Partridge fiercely attacks the argument that the present usage is acceptable because it is often used: " 'Good' in the sense of 'used by good writers' yes! But are we to sacrifice lucidity and clarity and the subtle employment of nuance to the sacred cause of carelessness? Is the lowest common denominator to be the norm?" Conversely, its entry on *none* contains descriptive passages involving the historical aspects of language change:

> It is quite true that "none" contains the Anglo-Saxon ān (one), as also for that matter does "any". But Anglo-Saxon grammar is not English grammar; and both words have been indifferently singular and plural for six centuries. (Partridge 1957: 205)

But here, as in some examples from *Modern* discussed above, emotional and harsh words are used on upholders of the rule of singular *none*, such as: "Indeed, it is worse; for vulgarity may be forgiven, but pretentiousness carries its own heavy punishment."

### 4.3.4 *The Complete Plain Words*

Like in the entry on the split infinitive in *Modern*, there are examples of Gowers simultaneously describing and evaluating, making the legitimacy of his precept questionable. For example, in the passage on the split infinitive, he explains how commonly found upholders of the rule are by stating that "sufferers from the same malady in a milder form can be found on every hand".

Still, *Complete Plain* stands out as the first source whose discourse is elaborately descriptive and less evaluative. Although the following passage does not strictly relate to the *between you and I/me* phenomenon, the first part of the entry on that subject is worth quoting: "About the age-long conflict between *it is I* and *it is me,* no more need be said than that, in the present stage of the battle, most people would think 'it is I' pedantic in talk, and 'it is me' improper in writing". This passage demonstrates awareness of differences in grammar of spoken and written forms of language and how the differing attitudes are affecting this phenomenon.

Also in the entry on singular *none,* there are descriptive passages: "A verb some way from its subject is sometimes lured away from its proper number by a noun closer to it" and "[s]ometimes the weight of a plural pushed the verb into the wrong number, even though they are not next to one another […]". These specify under which circumstances the given construction is used. Still, the phrasings "**lured** away from its **proper** noun" and "**wrong** number" seem to speak of what Gowers thinks of such usage. However, the passage following the passage above is highly descriptive:

> But in one or two exceptional instances the force of this attraction has conquered the grammarians. With the phrase *more than one* the pull of *one* is so strong that the singular is always used (e.g. 'more than one question was asked'), and owing to the pull of the plural in such a sentence as 'none of the questions were answered' *none* has come to be used indifferently with a singular or plural verb. (Gowers 1963: 185-186)

### 4.3.5 *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage*

*Cambridge* is by far the most descriptive of the six usage guides. The best example of this is the entry on *different from/to/than* which provides a long account of different uses in Anglophone countries, reasons for why different constructions are used, how the rule has come to be and arguments against it. However, in the split infinitive entry there are some evaluative words against the rule: "There's little virtue in a sentence which avoids the split infinitive so clumsily as to make obvious what the writer was trying not to do" and "[18$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ century grammarians'] censure cast long shadows into [the 20$^{th}$ century]". Nevertheless,

these are exceptions to the generally objective tone of the usage guide.

However, there are some prescriptive recommendations based on norms in writing: “But because between you and I seems to have become a shibboleth […], it’s to be avoided in writing”. Recommendations on split infinitives also take into account a stylistic effect of its use:

> * Don’t split an infinitive if the result is an inelegant sentence.
> * Do split infinitives to avoid awkward wording, to preserve natural rhythm, and especially to achieve the intended emphasis and meaning. (Peters 2004: 513)

### 4.3.6 *Strictly English*

Descriptive passages are very scarce in *Strictly*, and it is arguably the least descriptive of all the usage guides studied. About the split infinitive, there is some history regarding the issue. Like *Cambridge*, which ascribes the invention of the rule partly to 18th century grammarians, this guide also explains the rule as a remnant from that time. However, *Strictly* is even more specific, claiming that it was Lowth who was one of the main advocates of the rule: “This began with the Latinists, notably Lowth, arguing that since the infinitive was intact in that language, it had better be as intact as possible in our own too”. A fact which is not true, according to Lynch (2009: 98-99) and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2011).

*Strictly* does contain statements regarding what dictionaries say about the usage, but it continues with dismissals of those facts as irrelevant: “The dictionary now says that the use in the plural is common. That does not mean it is correct” or “The dictionary declares the etymology of *no* to be a variant of *none.* That does not settle the point about its usage, however” (Heffer 2010: 46).

*Strictly* also displays a rather judgemental tone when describing usage, as in this passage on *between you and I/me*:

> Indeed, it is in usages such as this that those (and they exist) who argue for the redundancy of *whom* are at their weakest. When using a construction with nouns and pronouns it appears to be second nature to forget that the pronoun must be in the accusative, especially if it comes second after the noun. So we are always reading, or hearing, “between you and I” […] (Heffer 2010: 118)

## 5. Discussion

This discussion is divided into three sections which treat different aspects of the findings. The first section deals with the precepts as such, their diachronic trends and how the recommendations vary from guide to guide. The second section deals with the discourse of

the guides, how descriptivism and prescriptivism are manifested, and possible diachronic changes in descriptive and prescriptive approaches. The third section discusses prescriptive psychology and conflicting prescriptive ideas.

## 5.1 Attitudes to the phenomena throughout the period

No diachronic changes in attitudes towards any stigmatised language features, such as a more restrictive or permissive approach, could be observed within the chosen period of time. However, some phenomena are approached in a similar way throughout the entire period, suggesting even longer stretching trends. While attitudes to the placement of *only* and *different from/to/than* differ seemingly arbitrarily, *between you and I/me*, the split infinitive and, to some extent, singular *none*, are handled uniformly by the guides.

That *between you and I/me* received such a high rating on Crystal's list is not surprising; this rule was common during the 18th century, and 47 grammars, evenly spread out across the century, proscribe the *I*-construction (Sundby et al 1991: 173-174). The great attention given to this feature by early prescriptivists could thus have contributed to the uniformity of the modern usage guides; as a certain view is established, less room is left for debate. Additionally, the remarkably small number of emotional words used to describe the feature is noteworthy and suggests an absence of critical spirit (the use of "barbaric" (Heffer 2010: 118) is unusually strong).

The split infinitive is approached differently, and uniformity manifests itself in a completely different manner. The long entries and emotional language point to the rule still being in the focus of usage guides. Compared to the precept on *between you and I/me*, this rule has a different history. As it was not introduced until the 1830s and reached its peak of attention in the early 20th century (Lynch 2009: 97-99), the debate regarding its usage was very much alive throughout the century. The result is an objection to the previous precept, often in a passionate manner. For example, Gowers (1963: 219) in *Complete Plain* quotes a passage with a split infinitive and calls it "an example of a good literary craftsman goaded into apologetic rebellion against this tyranny".

Two phenomena are not mentioned in *King's*: the singular *none* and the placement of *only*. The limited attention devoted to the singular *none* throughout the guides as well as the general permissive attitude (*Strictly* being the only guide opposed to the construction) seem to indicate acceptance of the plural construction. The rule against the phenomenon was, as shown by Sundby et al. (1991: 149), already formulated by the 18th century prescriptivists

(although not to the same extent as *between you and I/me*). Perhaps, a widespread usage has led to acceptance of the phenomenon, even amongst the 20th-century prescriptivists. In fact, when *Complete Plain* describes the concord exception of plural *none*, it states that "in one or two exceptional instances the force of this attraction has conquered the grammarians" (Gowers 1963: 185-186), which suggests certain resignation to common usage. It is thus plausible that the absence of the precept in *King's* is due to the phenomenon not being seen as an issue.

The other rule not mentioned in *King's*, the placement of *only*, is treated differently. The silence in *King's* is followed by a long entry and an outrage against the rule in *Modern*. This is in turn followed by a highly emotional tone in favour of the rule in *Usage*, whilst *Complete Plain* presents a more nuanced argument both for and against the rule. The fact that attitudes to the phenomenon change from ignoring it to passionately debating it, indicates a fluctuation in the history of this rule. In fact, *Complete Plain* states that the rule seems to be new: "*only*-snooping seems to have become as popular a sport with some purists as split-infinitive-snooping was a generation ago" (Gowers 1963: 170).

Prescriptions regarding the placement of *only* are not, in fact, new, as can be observed in the dictionary by Sundby et al (1991). However, an important distinction has to be made: during the 18th century, the rule is not uniform and does not always agree with modern precept as the same type of construction is treated in different ways, placing *only* before as well as after the word it modifies. Thus, a sentence of the type "Theism can only be opposed to Polytheism or Atheism", is corrected by some 18th-century grammars as "can be opposed only to Polytheism" and by others as "can be opposed to Polytheism … only". A sentence of the type "I only spoke three words" is corrected as "spoke only" by some grammars, while *only* is placed last in another (Sundby et al. 1991: 419-422). There are even some recommendations which clearly go against the modern precept. For example, John Burn corrects "reserving a trapdoor to himself, to which only he had a key" as "to which he only had" in 1766 (Sundby et al. 1991: 419). The difference in preference of letting *only* modify the preceding word and the modern precept requiring *only* to modify the subsequent word, is clearly shown when *Usage* corrects "the wise only possess ideas" to "only the wise"(Partridge 1957: 215), or when *Cambridge* states that "[t]he secretary only received the letter" indicates that "[the secretary] did not open it"(Peters 2004: 394).

Evidently, prescriptivists continued to work on this rule. The placement of *only* was not a uniformly formulated rule during the 18th century and has changed since then; hence there is room for debate regarding the preferred construction. Milroy and Milroy state that "it often

happens that a particular usage is not attacked as non-standard until it has become very general and widespread" (1999: 18). Thus, a change in the precept also indicates a change in usage. This is further supported by Percy's suggestion that "[the early prescriptivists'] normative strictures sometimes reinforced rather than triggered standardization and had a limited impact on subsequent usage" (2012: 452). The change in usage could thus have caused the rule to be revived during the early 20th century, now in its reworked form. This, in turn, leading to the fierce reactions following its absence in *King's*.

Interestingly, in recent research conducted by Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2013), it is found that a construction of the type 'He *only* had one chapter to finish' (which would be proscribed against by modern and 18th-century prescriptivists) is generally accepted, and that the acceptance of the construction has increased since the 1970s. If this is an indication of a less prescriptive attitude or a change in usage is a question for future research.

The rules on *different from/to/than* display no clear trends. In 18th-century prescriptions (Sundby et al. 1991: 86), *from* is considered the correct form, as it is in modern precept. But despite the fact that the precept has not changed over time, it spawns a wide array of opinions and approaches in the usage guides under study. This diversity could signify that it is the author's own preference rather than a general consensus which decides what the proper usage is. Two examples that strengthen this suggestion are the entries in *King's* and *Usage*, which despite stating that *to* is common or acceptable to use (*King's* even explicitly states that "[t]here is no essential reason whatever why either set should not be as well followed by *to* as by *from*" (Fowler; Fowler 1906: 162)), proceed to argue against the construction. This agrees with the statement made by Milroy and Milroy, that "language guardians usually feel a strong compulsion to select one […] from a set of equivalent usages and recommend that as the 'correct' form[, and] their choice of preferred form is often arbitrary" (1999: 14-15). Milroy and Milroy further say that the choice of *from* as correct "was probably socially motivated" by the 18th-century prescriptivists, and likely "rested on […] the observed usage of the 'best people' at that time" (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 14-15). A social motivation seems to be evident in some modern guides as well: thus, *King's* states that *to* is seen as a solecism by authorities, *Strictly* condemns the "supposedly educated people" who use constructions other than *from* (Heffer 2010: 118), and *Usage* says of the common use of *than* in American newspapers that "[w]hether this is regrettable is a question of taste", implying that the author thinks it is regrettable (Partridge 1957: 330).

## 5.2 Descriptivism versus prescriptivism throughout the period

Not only does the character of descriptivism differ between the guides, but variation can be observed within the guides. Different phenomena are described in diverse ways, and descriptive passages vary in length and in tone, which makes it difficult to find a trend regarding descriptive approaches. This is further complicated by the amount of personal opinions and emotional vocabulary. As in the situation of the varying opinions on *different from/to/than* described in the previous section, the tone of discourse seems to be governed by personal preferences as well, rather than reflecting a general trend. This is evident in *Usage,* when the entries on the placement of *only* and *between you and I/me* are compared. The former is, as mentioned, the most prescriptive entry within that book (possibly the most prescriptive of all entries under study), and it explicitly states that usage is irrelevant; the rule should be followed regardless of how common other constructions are. In the entry on *between you and I/me*, the *I*-construction is labelled a *sense construction*, and it is thus stated that this idiom trumps traditional grammar, which certainly contradicts the author's attitude to the placement of *only.*

In this discussion on descriptive features, *Strictly* needs special attention. This guide is, despite being the most recent, the least permissive and least descriptive of all guides under study. This is even more unexpected considering the fact that *Cambridge,* published six years prior, is the most descriptive and neutral guide. A review by Pullum (2010**,** online) suggests that *Strictly* perhaps is not representative of the general tone in modern precept: "Simon Heffer enjoys writing in the manner he imagines was current around 1900". Pullum also claims that the book is full of errors "[which] aren't minor, forgivable slips; they are outrageous, whales-are-fish howlers". Crystal (2010**,** online) is also sceptical, and states that Heffer relies on "century-old sources".

Although reviews such as these might imply that *Strictly* is uniquely obsolete in its tone, the guide could be part of a new trend. Beal (2009) states that the 21st century is in fact seeing a resurgent "new prescriptivism". She maintains that the 18th and the 21st centuries have four features in common which have caused this new movement towards prescriptivism: a demand by social climbers for guidance, a "self-improvement" culture, a fear of the underclass, and a pressure on women to speak eloquently (2009: 42-51). In its passages on *between you and I/me* and *different from/to/than*, *Strictly* speaks negatively of 'barbaric' and 'demotic' usage, suggesting that this usage guide is being marketed towards social climbers as well as conveying a fear of the underclass.

Modern usage guides seem to follow two parallel, simultaneously existing approaches:

prescriptive and descriptive, works such as *Strictly* belonging to a prescriptive type and works such as *Cambridge* following descriptive methods. Studying the two categories of guides separately might reveal ongoing trends in the respective type; in particular, in what way they represent actual usage. Thus, if *Strictly* and similar guides are studied in the context of being part of new prescriptivism, and *Cambridge* and similar guides are studied as being part of descriptive accounts of language usage, patterns of different linguistic trends in society could emerge.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that because these books are usage guides, they cannot avoid making judgements; otherwise they would not serve their purpose. However, a difference must be drawn between a neutral recommendation to avoid a phenomenon under certain circumstances and labelling users of a construction with demeaning epithets.

## 5.3 Motives behind prescriptions

It is interesting that the singular *none* and the split infinitive rules are given such high ratings on Crystal's list, even though these precepts were objected to in all guides published prior to the list. The causes of this need to be discussed. Crystal (2003: 194) writes the following about the letters which the list was based on:

> Of those writers who mentioned their age, the vast majority were over 50. Many were over 70. Hardly anyone responded to the request 'usages liked'. On the other hand, only a few restricted themselves to just three points under 'usages disliked'. Several letters were over four pages long, full of detailed complaints. […] The language of most letters was intemperate and extreme […]

It seems, thus, that the informants constitute a rather narrow demographic group. The selection could have been limited by the type of audience the program targeted, or by the fact that only a part of the audience with certain views wanted to partake in the poll. A similar pattern is discovered in Tieken-Boon van Ostade's report (2013), in which most participants of the poll were between 50 and 70, despite the poll starting as a blog post (aiming to attract younger informants). Thus, the interest in these matters is clearly greater amongst people of higher age. This agrees with the results of Mittins et al. (1970) who observed an inverse correlation between tolerance and age in their study (p. 21).

Moreover, the fact that the complaints of Crystal's list disagree with the recommendations of the usage guides is somewhat counterintuitive. Would not people who have strict views of language, the older generation in particular, be apt to follow the authoritative usage guides? There are several explanations for this contradictory situation.

Firstly, Milroy and Milroy point out that it may not be language in itself that is the target of critique, but that "language discrimination stands as proxy […] and may be openly used to discriminate against lower class or minority speakers while avoiding direct reference to class or ethnicity" (1999: 2-3). In a similar way, certain attitudes to language stand for a set of "social and political attitudes, including stances strongly tinged with authoritarianism" (45-46). Thus, the complaints could be part of ideology rather than being seen as purely linguistic.

Secondly, the overt prestige of different language variants is well known and informants "rarely express their true, unbiased opinions on the use of a particular feature, especially when they are aware of its disputed status" (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2013). Nor do they report their own usage correctly, but "tend to report the form they consider to be socially accepted rather than the form they use themselves" (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 15). Thus, a compilation such as Crystal's could reflect what the informants think should be criticised in order to make a social standpoint.

Thirdly, as Pullum (2014: 21-22) concludes when explaining the aversion against using the passive construction, "[o]versimplification and overkill" in prescriptions can lead to misunderstanding among the population about what constitutes a precept and why a certain construction should be avoided. He also states that it is common to treat "regulative rules that are supported mainly by the taste of the person making the proposal [as] constitutive correctness conditions" (Pullum 2006: 15). This could, somewhat paradoxically, both explain the differing views of the usage guides, as well as the fact that the complaints, despite their prescriptive nature, sometimes ignore the consensus of prescriptive authorities. It seems as if there is a demand for rules for the sake of rules.

## 6. Conclusions and future research

Although no conclusion could be made on trends in diachronic changes of the rules under study, the present study has shown that there is certain uniformity in the way the usage guides present some prescriptions. That the correct construction is considered '*between you and me*' and not '*between you and I*' is generally agreed upon. So is the fact that the split infinitive may indeed be used and the proscription against it is unnecessary. Conversely, seemingly arbitrary variations were also observed, such as the many different opinions expressed regarding the placement of *only* and whether *different* should be followed by *to, than* or *from.*

Neither could a general trend towards a more descriptive or more prescriptive tone be

observed. Instead, unexpected differences in levels of descriptivism were found within short timespans. Most notable was the contrast between *Cambridge* (2004) and *Strictly* (2010), the most and the least descriptive guides, respectively.

The study has also confirmed that personal preference may be a considerable factor in prescriptions. This has been suggested not only by the variation between the guides, but also in variations within the guides, such as fluctuating levels of prescriptivism and descriptivism, the use of neutral language together with highly emotional language, and sometimes contradictory attitudes to correctness. The importance of personal preferences was especially manifest when points of usage that were not proscribed by the guides were still considered stigmatised by the informants whose letters were the basis of Crystal's list.

Regarding future research on this area of language, there are plenty of possibilities. Because of the limited nature of this study, a rather small amount of material was analysed. Though conclusions can be drawn even from rather few usage guides (an in-depth study of a single guide can also yield interesting results), the limited amount of texts from each guide proved somewhat problematical for the analysis. Hence, not only would studying a larger amount of entries be beneficial, but attention should also be given to the preface of the guides (or introductions to respective chapters, etc.). In this way, a clearer picture can be formed of the author's general attitude to language use, and the entries should subsequently be studied with that premise in mind. With the launch of the HUGE database, mentioned in the section on previous research, new possibilities will open for this type of research.

To further study the connection between usage guides and usage, the use of proscribed constructions could be studied in corpora of various texts, revealing how frequent different proscribed constructions are. This could show whether attention to phenomena in guides and complaints on usage correlate with the occurrence of stigmatized forms, and in what kinds of texts such forms appear.

As mentioned, the placement of *only* seems to be less of an issue today compared to earlier studies. Similarly, other constructions will inevitably lose the stigma surrounding them, and other points of usage become controversial. In Tieken-Boon van Ostade's research (2013), for example, the construction *could of*, where *of* replaces *have*, is fiercely criticised and deemed unacceptable by many. Thus, an updated set of criticised phenomena could provide interesting results, as opinions change on what is viewed as controversial. However, when collecting such opinions, measures should be taken in order to receive a more demographically diverse group of informants. This would enable a collection of opinions from people normally not represented in these types of studies.

Additionally, the social mechanisms behind prescriptions deserve more attention. This essay has touched upon the reasons behind prescriptivism, but the topic is vast and important to explore more in-depth. Related to this topic is how prescriptions are motivated. Pullum (2006) lists nine reasons used by prescriptivists: nostalgia, classicism, authoritarianism, aestheticism, coherentism, logicism, functionalism and asceticism. Although he states that "they're just ad hoc one-word memory pointers" (2006: 6), they still point to the diversity in attitudes and psychological motives behind prescriptions, and further exploration of how prescriptions are justified would be interesting.

Lastly, the possibility of a new prescriptivism on the rise and its impact on our attitudes to language is also highly relevant for future studies: what form will the split infinitive of the 21st century come in?

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# Appendix

Primary source material. Usage guides listed in chronological order.

## The King's English

Henry Watson Fowler; Francis George Fowler. 1906. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
**NB!** The King's English does not contain entries on the placement of *only* and singular *none*.

### *Between you and I/me*

3. When a verb or preposition governs two pronouns united by *and*, &c, the second is apt to go wrong—a bad blunder.
*Between you and I* is often heard in talk; and, in literature:

> And now, my dear, let you and I say a few words about this unfortunate affair—TROLLOPE.
> It is kept locked up in a marble casket, quite out of reach of you or I. —S. FERRIER.
> She found everyone's attention directed to Mary, and she herself entirely overlooked.—S. FERRIER.

(p. 61)

### The split infinitive

25. 'Split' Infinitives

The 'split' infinitive has taken such hold upon the consciences of journalists that, instead of warning the novice against splitting his infinitives, we must warn him against the curious superstition that the splitting or not splitting makes the difference between a good and a bad writer. The split infinitive is an ugly thing, as will be seen from our examples below; but it is one among several hundred ugly things, and the novice should not allow it to occupy his mind. Even that mysterious quality, 'distinction' of style, may in modest measure be attained by a splitter of infinitives: 'The book is written with a distinction (save in the matter of split infinitives) unusual in such works.'—Times.

The time has come to once again voice the general discontent.— *Times.*
It should be authorized to immediately put in hand such work.—*Times.*
Important negotiations are even now proceeding to further cement trade relations.—*Times*.
We were not as yet strong enough in numbers to seriously influence the poll.—*Times*.
Keep competition with you unless you wish to once more see a similar state of things to those prevalent prior to the inauguration . . .—*Guernsey Evening Press.*
And that she should force me, by the magic of her pen to mentally acknowledge, albeit with wrath and shame, my own inferiority.—CORELLI.
The oil lamp my landlady was good enough to still allow me the use of. —CORELLI.
The 'persistent agitation' ... is to so arouse public opinion on the subject as to .. .—*Times*.
In order to slightly extend that duration in the case of a few.—*Times.*
To thus prevent a constant accretion to the Jewish population of Russia from this country would be nobler work .. .—*Times.*

(p. 319)

## *Different from/to/than*

The adjectives *different* and *averse*, with their adverbs or nouns, *differently, difference, aversion, averseness,* call for a few words of comment. There is no essential reason whatever why either set should not be as well followed by *to* as by *from.* But *different to* is regarded by many newspaper editors and others in authority as a solecism, and is therefore better avoided by those to whom the approval of such authorities is important. It is undoubtedly gaining ground, and will probably displace *different from* in no long time; perhaps, however, the conservatism that still prefers *from* is not yet to be named pedantry. It is at any rate defensive, and not offensive pedantry, *different to* (though 'found in writers of all ages'—*Oxford Dictionary*) being on the whole the aggressor. With *averse,* on the other hand, though the *Oxford Dictionary* gives a long roll of good names on each side, the use of *from* may perhaps be said to strike most readers as a distinct protest against the more natural *to,* so that *from* is here the aggressor, and the pedantry, if it is pedantry, is offensive. Our advice is to write *different from* and *averse to*. We shall give a few examples, and add to them two sentences in which the incorrect use of *from* with other words looks like the result of insisting on the slightly artificial use of it after *different* and *averse.*

My experience caused me to make quite different conclusions to those of the Coroner for Westminster.— *Times.*

It will be noticed that *to* is more than usually uncomfortable when it does not come next to *different.*

We must feel charitably towards those who think differently to ourselves.—*Daily Telegraph.*
Why should these profits be employed differently to the profits made by capitalists at home ?—LORD GOSCHEN.
Ah, how different were my feelings as I sat proudly there on the box to those I had the last time I mounted that coach !—THACKERAY.
What is the great difference of the one to the other ?—*Daily Telegraph.*

*From* would in this last be clearly better than *to*; but *between the two* would be better than either.

(p. 162)

## A Dictionary of Modern English Usage

Henry Watson Fowler. 1926 [2009]. (1st edition. Editorial material by David Crystal). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### *Between you and I/me*

1. *Between you & I* is a piece of false grammar not sanctioned, like the contrary lapse *It is me*, even by colloquial usage; a similar lapse is seen in *It was a tragedy of this kind which brought home to my partner & I the necessity for…*

(p. 249)

**me** is technically wrong in *It wasn't me* &c: but, the phrase being of its very nature colloquial, such a lapse is of no importance; & this is perhaps the only temptation to use *me* instead of *I*. There is more danger of using *I* for *me*, especially when *& me* is required after another noun or pronoun that has taken responsibility for the grammar & has not a separate objective case; *between you & I, let you & I try*, are not uncommon (see BETWEEN, LET), &: *Sir, – A rich friend of ours wrote & asked* my husband & I *to dine at the most expensive restaurant & go to the theatre on his birthday.*

(p. 346)

**1. *B.*** *you & I*, which is often said, perhaps results from a hazy remembrance of hearing *you & me* corrected in the subjunctive.

(p. 50)

### The split infinitive

The English-speaking world may be divided into (1) those who neither know nor care what a split infinitive is; (2) those who do not know, but care very much; (3) those who know & condemn; (4) those who know & approve; & (5) those who know & distinguish.

1. Those who neither know nor care are the vast majority, & are a happy folk, to be envied by most of the minority classes; 'to really understand' comes readier to their lips & pens than 'really to understand', they see no reason why they should not say it (small blame to them, seeing that reasons are not their critics' strong point), & they do say it, to the discomfort of some among us, but not to their own.
2. To the second class, those who do not know but do care, who would as soon be caught putting their knives in their mouths as splitting an infinitive but have only hazy notions of what constitutes that deplorable breach of etiquette, this article is chiefly addressed. These people betray by their practice that their aversion to the split infinitive springs not from instinctive good taste, but from tame acceptance of the misinterpreted opinion of others; for they will subject their sentences to the queerest distortions, all to escape imaginary split infinitives. 'To really understand' is a s.i.; 'to

really be understood' is a s.i.; 'to be really understood' is not one; the havoc that is played with much well-intentioned writing by failure to grasp that distinction is incredible. Those upon whom the fear of infinitive-splitting sits heavy should remember that to give conclusive evidence, by distortions, of misconceiving the nature of the s.i. is far more damaging to their literary pretensions than an actual lapse could be; for it exhibits them as deaf to the normal rhythm of English sentences. No sensitive ear can fail to be shocked if the following examples are read aloud, by the strangeness of the indicated adverbs. Why on earth, the reader wonders, is that word out of its place? He will find, on looking through again, that each has been turned out of a similar position, viz between the word *be* & a passive participle. Reflection will assure him that the cause of dislocation is always the same — all these writers have sacrificed the run of their sentences to the delusion that 'to be really understood' is a split infinitive. It is not; & the straightest non-splitter of us all can with a clear conscience restore each of the adverbs to its rightful place: He was proposed at the last moment as a candidate likely *generally* to be accepted. / When the record of this campaign comes *dispassionately* to be written, & in just perspective, it will be found that ... /The leaders have given instructions that the lives & property shall *scrupulously* be respected./New principles will have *boldly* to be adopted if the Scottish case is to be met./This is a very serious matter, which dearly ought *further* to be inquired into./There are many points raised in the report which need *carefully* to be explored./Only two ways of escaping from the conflict without loss, by this time become too serious *squarely* to be faced, have ever offered themselves./The Headmaster of a public school possesses very great powers, which ought *most carefully & considerately* to be exercised./The time to get this revaluation put through is when the amount paid by the State to the localities is *very largely* to be increased./But the party whose leader in the House of Commons acts in this way cannot fail *deeply* to be discredited by the way in which he flings out & about these false charges.

3. The above writers are bogy-haunted creatures who for fear of splitting an infinitive abstain from doing something quite different, i.e. dividing *be* from its complement by an adverb; see further under POSITION OF ADVERBS. Those who presumably do know what split infinitives are, & condemn them, are not so easily identified, since they include all who neither commit the sin nor flounder about in saving themselves from it, all who combine with acceptance of conventional rules a reasonable dexterity. But when the dexterity is lacking, disaster follows. It does not add to a writer's readableness if readers are pulled up now & again to wonder — Why this distortion?

Ah, to be sure, a non-split die-hard! That is the mental dialogue occasioned by each of the adverbs in the examples below. It is of no avail merely to fling oneself desperately out of temptation; one must so do it that no traces of the struggle remain; that is, sentences must be thoroughly remodelled instead of having a word lifted from its original place & dumped elsewhere: – What alternative can be found which the Pope has not condemned, & which will make it possible *to organize legally* public worship? / It will, when better understood, tend *firmly to establish* relations between Capital & Labour. / Both Germany & England have done ill in not combining *to forbid flatly* hostilities. / Every effort must be made *to increase adequately* professional knowledge & attainments. / We have had *to shorten somewhat* Lord D——'s letter. / The kind of sincerity which enables an author *to move powerfully* the heart would ... / Safeguards should be provided *to prevent effectually* cosmopolitan financiers from manipulating these reserves.

4. Just as those who know & condemn the s.i. include many who are not recognizable, only the clumsier performers give positive proof of resistance to temptation, so too those who know & approve are not distinguishable with certainty; when a man splits an infinitive, he may be doing it unconsciously as a member of our class 1, or he may be deliberately rejecting the trammels of convention & announcing that he means to do as he will with his own infinitives. But, as the following examples are from newspapers of high repute, & high newspaper tradition is strong against splitting, it is perhaps fair to assume that each specimen is a manifesto of independence: It will be found possible *to considerably improve* the present wages of the miners without jeopardizing the interests of capital. / Always providing that the Imperialists do not feel strong enough *to decisively assert* their power in the revolted provinces. / But even so, he seems *to still be allowed* to speak at Unionist demonstrations. / It is the intention of the Minister of Transport *to substantially increase* all present rates by means of a general percentage. / The men in many of the largest districts are declared *to strongly favour* a strike if the minimum wage is not conceded.

   It should be noticed that in these the separating adverb could have been placed outside the infinitive with little or in most cases no damage to the sentence-rhythm (*considerably* after *miners*, *decisively* after *power*, *still* with clear gain after *be*, *substantially* after *rates*, & *strongly* at some loss after *strike*), so that protest seems a safe diagnosis.

5. The attitude of those who know & distinguish is something like this: We admit that separation of *to* from its infinitive (viz *be, do, have, sit, doubt, kill*, or other verb inflectionally similar) is not in itself desirable, & we shall not gratuitously say either 'to mortally wound' or 'to mortally be wounded'; but we are not foolish enough to confuse the latter with 'to be mortally wounded', which is blameless English, nor 'to just have heard' with 'to have just heard', which is also blameless. We maintain, however, that a real s.i., though not desirable in itself, is preferable to either of two things, to real ambiguity, & to patent artificiality. For the first, we will rather write 'Our object is to further cement trade relations' than, by correcting into 'Our object is further to cement ...', leave it doubtful whether an additional object or additional cementing is the point. And for the second, we take it that such reminders of a tyrannous convention as 'in not combining to forbid flatly hostilities' are far more abnormal than the abnormality they evade. We will split infinitives sooner than be ambiguous or artificial; more than that, we will freely admit that sufficient recasting will get rid of any s.i. without involving either of those faults, & yet reserve to ourselves the right of deciding in each case whether recasting is worth while. Let us take an example: 'In these circumstances, the Commission, judging from the evidence taken in London, has been feeling its way to modifications intended to better equip successful candidates for careers in India & at the same time to meet reasonable Indian demands.' To better equip? We refuse 'better to equip' as a shouted reminder of the tyranny; we refuse 'to equip better' as ambiguous (*better* an adjective?); we regard 'to equip successful candidates better' as lacking compactness, as possibly tolerable from an anti-splitter, but not good enough for us. What then of recasting? 'intended to make successful candidates fitter for' is the best we can do if the exact sense is to be kept, it takes some thought to arrive at the correction; was the game worth the candle?

After this inconclusive discussion, in which, however, the author's opinion has perhaps been allowed to appear with indecent plainness, readers may like to settle for themselves whether, in the following sentence, ‘either to secure’ followed by ‘to resign’, or ‘to either secure’ followed by ‘resign’, should have been preferred – an issue in which the meaning & the convention are pitted against each other: – The speech has drawn an interesting letter from Sir Anthony MacDonnell, who states that his agreement with Mr Wyndham was never cancelled, & that Mr Long was too weak *either to secure* the dismissal of Sir Antony or himself to resign office.

It is perhaps hardly fair that this article should have quoted no split infinitives except such as, being reasonably supposed (as in 4) to be deliberate, are likely to be favourable specimens. Let it therefore conclude with one borrowed from a reviewer, to whose description of it no exception need be taken: 'A book ... of which the purpose is thus — with a deafening split

infinitive — stated by its author: "Its main idea is *to* historically, even while events are maturing, & divinely — from the Divine point of view — *impeach* the European system of Church & States".'
(p. 558-561)

## The placement of *only*

**only,** adv. : its placing and misplacing. *I read the other day of a man who ' only died a week ago ', as if he could have done anything more striking or final; what was meant by the writer was that he 'died only a week ago'.* There speaks one of those friends from whom the English language may well pray to be saved, one of the modern precisians who have more zeal than discretion, & wish to restrain liberty as such, regardless of whether it is harmfully or harmlessly exercised. It is pointed out in several parts of this book that illogicalities & inaccuracies of expression tend to be eliminated as a language grows older & its users attain to a more conscious mastery of their materials. But this tendency has its bad as well as its good effects ; the pedants who try to forward it when the illogicality is only apparent or the inaccuracy of no importance are turning English into an exact science or an automatic machine ; if they are not quite botanizing upon their mother's grave, they are at least clapping a straight waistcoat upon their mother tongue, when wiser physicians would refuse to certify the patient.

The design is to force us all, whenever we use the adverb *only,* to spend time in considering which is the precise part of the sentence strictly qualified by it, & then put it there – this whether there is any danger or none of the meaning's being false or ambiguous because *only* is so placed as to belong grammatically to a whole expression instead of to a part of it, or to be separated from the part it specially qualifies by another part.

It may at once be admitted that there is an orthodox placing for *only,* but it does not follow that there are not often good reasons for departing from orthodoxy. For *He only died a week ago* no better defence is perhaps possible than that it is the order that most people have always used & still use, & that the risk of misunderstanding being chimerical, it is not worth while to depart from the natural. Remember that in speech there is not even the possibility of misunderstanding, because the intonation of *died* is entirely different if it, & not *a week ago,* is qualified by *only* ; & it is fair that a reader should be supposed capable of supplying the decisive intonation where there is no temptation to go wrong about it. But take next an example in which, ambiguity being practically impossible, the case against heterodox placing is much stronger: *–Mackenzie only seems to go wrong when he lets in yellow ; & yellow seems to be still the standing difficulty of the colour printer.* The orthodox place for *only* is immediately before *when*, & the antithesis between seeming to go & really going, which is apt to suggest itself though not intended, makes the displacement here ill advised ; its motive, however, is plain – to announce the limited nature of the wrong before the wrong itself, & so mitigate the censure : a quite sound rhetorical instinct, &, if *goes* had been used instead of *seems to go,* a sufficient defence of the heterodoxy. But there are many sentences in which, owing to greater length, it is much more urgent to get this announcement of purport made by an advanced *only.* E.g., the orthodox *It would be safe to prophesy success to this heroic enterprise only if reward & merit always corresponded* positively cries out to have its *only* put early after *would,* & unless that is done the hearer or reader is led astray ; yet the precisian

is bound to insist on orthodoxy here as much as in *He only died a week ago*.

The advice offered is this : there is an orthodox position for the adverb, easily determined in case of need ; to choose another position that may spoil or obscure the meaning is bad ; but a change in position that has no such effect except technically is both justified by historical & colloquial usage & often demanded by rhetorical needs.

The OED remarks on the point should be given : '*Only* was formerly often placed away from the word or words which it limited ; this is still frequent in speech, where the stress & pause prevent ambiguity, but is now avoided by perspicuous writers'. Which implies the corollary that when perspicuity is not in danger it is needless to submit to an inconvenient restriction. A specimen or two are added for the reader's unaided consideration : *The address to be written on this side only./Europe only has a truce before it, but a truce that can be profited by./Some of the Metropolitan crossings can only now be negotiated with considerable risk./If only the foundry traces had been concerned, probably the employers would not have greatly objected to conceding an advance./I only know nothing shall induce me to go again./I only asked the question from habit./We can only form a sound & trustworthy opinion if we first consider a large variety of instances.*

(p 405-406)

## Singular *none*

**none.** 1. It is a mistake to suppose that the pronoun is sing. only & must at all costs be followed by sing. verbs. &c. ; the OED explicitly states that pl. construction is commoner.

(p. 381)

## *Different from/to/than*

**different.** That d. can only be *followed by from* & not by *to* is a SUPERSTITION. Not only is *to* 'found in writers of all ages' (OED); the principle on which it is rejected (You do not say *differ to*; therefore you cannot say *d. to*) involves a hasty & ill-defined generalisation. Is it all derivatives, or derivative adjectives, or adjectives that were once participles, or actual participles, that must conform to the construction of their parent verbs? It is true of the last only; we cannot say *differing to*; but that leaves d. out in the cold. If it is all derivatives, why do we say *according, agreeably,* & *pursuant, to instructions,* when we have to say *this accords with, agrees with,* or *pursues, instructions*? If derivative adjectives, why *derogatory to, inconceivable to,* in contrast with *derogates from, not to be conceived by*? If ex-participle adjectives, why do *pleases, suffices, defies, me* go each its own way & yield *pleasant to, sufficient for, and defiant of, me*? The fact is that the objections to *d. to,* like those to AVERSE *to,* SYMPATHY *for,* & COMPARE *to,* are mere pedantries. This does not imply that *d. from* is wrong; on the contrary, it is 'now usual' (OED); but it is only so owing to the dead set made against *d. to* by mistaken critics.

(p. 113-114)

## Usage and Abusage

Eric Partridge. First published 1947, last revised 1957. This copy printed in 1963. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd.

### *Between you and I/me*

I is misused for *me* in such a sentence as 'He could only get tickets for you and I'. – Boyd quotes 'a girl like I' from *Gentlemen Prefer Blonds*.

(p.147)

**between you and I.** *Between* being a preposition, takes the accusative case equally with all other prepositions (*after me, after him and me, for you and me*): therefore, *between you and me. Between* and *betwixt* are, however, not, in function, parallel to *after, for, in, to,* where the preposition is governing single units: *for you and me* is *for you and for me*; *in him and me* (there is ambition) is *in him and in me*… But *between him and me, between you and me* do not equal *between him and between me, between you and between me,* the latter pair being nonsense. *He and I, you and I,* may be regarded in phrasal units, of which only the first member (*he* and *you*) take the accusative, thus: *between him and I, between you and I.* Also, there are persons that, immediately detecting the grammatical error in *between him and I,* are blind to that in *between you and I,* for the reason that *you* is the same in the accusative (*for you*) as in the nominative (*you are here*), whereas it is *for him* and *he is here*. *Between you and I,* though indefensible grammatically, may be regarded as a sense construction, and is often used by those who would never dream of saying *between he and I.*

(p. 56-57)

[Definition of sense-construction on p. 277-278]

### The split infinitive

In *The Queen's English,* Dean Alford scarcely troubles to discuss the matter, but seems to raise his very reverend eyebrows in sheer astonishment at the admission of such an error.

Dr C. T. Onions, in *An Advanced English Syntax,* is much more tolerant. 'The construction known by this name consists of the separation of *to* from the Infinitive by means of an adverb, e.g. "He used *to continually refer* to the subject", instead of "He used *continually to refer*", or "He used *to refer continually*". The construction is becoming more and more frequent, especially in newspapers, but it is generally admitted that a constant and unguarded use of it is not to be encouraged; some, indeed, would refuse altogether to recognize it, as being inelegant and un-English. (Instances like "For a time, the Merovings continued *to nominally rule*" are particularly ugly.) On the other hand, it may be said that its occasional use is of advantage in cases where it is desired to avoid ambiguity by indicating in this manner the close connexion of the adverb with the infinitive, and thus prevent its being taken in conjunction with some other word' e.g., 'Our object is to further cement trade relations', is obviously preferable to 'Our object is to cement further trade relations' (which yields a sense different from the one intended), and is less obviously but no less surely preferable to 'Our object is further to cement trade relations', which leaves it 'doubtful whether an additional object or additional cement is the point' (Fowler). H.W. Fowler writes

thus: ‘We maintain that a real split infinitive, though not desirable in itself’ – he implies that the sentence ought to be differently constructed – ‘is preferable to either of two things, to real ambiguity, and to patent artificiality’ (*The Split Infinitive*, S.P.E. Tract No. xv). As an example of patent artificiality he cites ‘In not combining to forbid flatly hostilities’, instead of the natural and sensible ‘in not combining to flatly forbid hostilities’; ‘In not combining flatly to forbid hostilities’ would obviously have been ambiguous.

Fowler, we see, speaks of a ‘real split infinitive’. Is there then, ‘an unreal split infinitive’? I myself have used one in the preceding paragraph: ‘The sentence ought *to be differently constructed*’, which is as blameless as ‘*to be mortally wounded*’ or ‘*to have just heard*’. There is a ‘split’ only when an adverb comes between *to* and an infinitive ‘to *clearly see*’.

Avoid the split infinitive wherever possible; but if it is the clearest and the most natural construction, use it boldly. The angels are on our side.

(p. 296)

## The placement of *only*

**only,** misplaced. Jespersen, *The Philosophy of Grammar,* ‘The plural *feet* from *foot* was formerly only mentioned as one of a few exceptions to the rule that plurals … were formed in *-s*’. Not ‘only mentioned’ but ‘mentioned only as one, etc.’ – ‘We only heard it yesterday’ should be ‘We heard it only yesterday’. Shakespeare makes this mistake in

> The summer’s flower is to the summer sweet
> Though to itself it only live and die

There is also ambiguity in the use of *only* where *alone* would be clearer, as in Nesfield’s example from Johnson (*Letter to Rev. Mr White*), ‘No book has been published since your departure of which much notice is taken. Faction only fills the town with pamphlets, and greater subjects are forgotten’. Nesfield takes *only* to be an adjective qualifying ‘faction’, but might it not be an adverb qualifying ‘fills’? Coleridge, a careful writer, at least once committed a misplacement: ‘the wise only possess ideas; the greater part of mankind are possessed by them’ (‘Notes on Robinson Crusoe’, 1830): properly, ‘only the wise’. Even G. K. Cheterson fell into the error of a misplaced *only*, as in ‘His black coat looked as if it were only black by being too dense a purple. His black beard looked as if it were only black by being too deep a blue’ (*The Man Who Was Thursday*). Nor are philosophers exempt: ‘We can only substitute a clear symbolism for an unprecise one by inspecting the phenomena which we want to describe’ (read ‘… one only by inspecting’), Ludwig Wittgenstein, ‘Logical Form’, in *The Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume ix*, 1929. – *Merely* is subject to the same vagaries. [Many American grammarians would suggest that in citing these examples of misplaced *only*, Mr Partridge defeats his own case. They are obviously good* English. An account for *only* in accord with the facts of usage will be found in Perrin, *An Index to Usage,* pp. 423-4; see also Curme, *Syntax*, pp. 135-6.]

* ‘Good’ in the sense of ‘used by good writers’ yes! But are we to sacrifice lucidity and clarity and the subtle employment of nuance to the sacred cause of carelessness? Is the lowest common denominator to be the norm? (E.P.)

(p. 215)

## Singular *none*

**none.**

(i) When *none = not one*, use the singular, as in ‘None of the newspapers has appeared this week’.
(ii) When *none = no one, no person, no-body*, the singular is correct; but, as indeed for (i) also, the plural is not regarded as a solecism: in both (i) and (ii), the plural is merely an infelicity, a defect that will not hinder the good enoughists.
(iii) When *none = no persons*, the verb is plural, as in ‘None have been so greedy of employments… as they who have least deserved their stations’ (Dryden). The corresponding singular pronoun is *no one*.
(Based on The O.E.D.)

Mr R. B. Hamilton of Nottingham has (17 Aug. 1947) written to me so pertinently that, with his very kind permission, I quote him word for word.

‘It is bad form nowadays to mention the Ten Commandments; so I will, with apologies, take you no further than the first, as it appears in the Prayer Book: “Thou shalt have none other gods but me”. The turn of phrase is archaic; but if you had pondered it, you might have cleared up, instead of thickening, the fog of pretentious misunderstanding which surrounds the use of “none”.

‘May I submit for your consideration the following sentences:

Q. Is there any sugar?
A. 1. No, there isn’t any sugar. (colloquial)
2. No, there isn’t any. (colloquial and elliptical)
3. No, there is no sugar. (formal)
4. No there is none. (formal and elliptical)

Q. Are there any plums?
A. 5. No, there aren’t any plums. (colloquial)
6. No, there aren’t any. (colloquial and elliptical)
7. No, there are no plums. (formal)
8. No, there are none. (formal and elliptical)

‘You will, I hope, agree that this arrangement has more than symmetry to recommend it. In the first place, all four replies in each case are exactly synonymous; secondly, they are all logical; and, thirdly, they are all idiomatic - they all slip off the tongue of careful and careless speakers alike; you hear them all every day of your life.

‘Are they all equally grammatical? It seems that they should be; for they are logical and idiomatic, and what is grammar but a mixture of logic and idiom? There is no dispute as to Nos 1 to 7; but when you come to No 8, you will find that there is a superstition that, in formal contexts, it should be re-written with the verb in the singular. The awkwardness of this is apparent; for it seems to require the question to be either “Is there any plums?” which is bad grammar, or “Is there any plum?”, which is not English at all. This awkwardness, however, recommends it to pompous or timid writers who, like fakirs, hope to gain merit by discomfort.

‘The superstition was I think invented by some 18th-century sciolist, who, misled by appearances and regardless of history and logic, decided that “none” was a contraction of “no one” and decreed that it should be followed by a singular verb. In point of fact, the truth is the

opposite; for “no” itself is nothing but a shortened form of “none” standing in the same relation to it as “my” does to “mine”; so that “none other gods” is archaic only in retaining the longer form, before an initial vowel, in attributive use, and the phrase answers to the modern “no other gods” precisely as the Biblical “mine eyes” answers to the modern “my eyes”. The phrase “no one” is therefore really a tautology (= not one one); and if Sentence No 8 is wrong, No 7 must be equally so.

‘It is quite true that “none” contains the Anglo-Saxon ān (one), as also for that matter does “any”. But Anglo-Saxon grammar is not English grammar; and both words have been indifferently singular and plural for six centuries.

‘If you will now look back to the sentences, you will see that the facts are as follows: (1) “No” is merely the attributive form of “none”; (2) “None” and “no” do *not* (except by accident) mean “not one” or “no one” or “no persons”; they mean “not any”, neither more nor less (it is impossible to construct any sentence which you cannot make into a question by substituting “any” for “none” and inverting the order of the words); and (3) “No”, “none”, and “any” are all singular or plural, according to the sense.

‘Let me then urge you to throw in your lot with the “good-enoughists” (what is good enough for the Prayer Book should be good enough for you) and admit these simple facts. It is no disgrace to yield when etymology, logic, and idiom are all against you. To say (as you suggest we should) “None of the newspapers has appeared” is no better than to say “No newspapers has appeared”. Indeed, it is worse; for vulgarity may be forgiven, but pretentiousness carries its own heavy punishment.’

After that, I retract.

(p. 204-205)

## *Different from/to/than*

**than, different… ‘**Here was quite a different kettle of fish than the one they had served up in the past’, Samuel Putnam, *Marguerite of Navarre.* The impeccably correct construction is *different … from*, although *different to* (c.f. French *différent à*) is permissible (see, for evidence, *The O.E.D.*); if one says that ‘one thing differs from’ (never *to*) ‘another’, why does one not, with equal naturalness, say, ‘is different from’? [Different … than seems to occur more and more frequently in the New York daily and weekly Press. Evidently the comparative sense of the word rather than the fact of its positive form may govern the syntax. Whether this is regrettable is a question of taste.]

(p. 329-330)

**other than** is the correct form (as also the similar combinations, *different from, opposite to, contrasted with*).

(p. 221)

## The Complete Plain Words

Gowers, Ernest. First published 1954, reprinted 1963. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd.

### *Between you and I/me*

About the age-long conflict between *it is I* and *it is me*, no more need be said than that, in the present stage of the battle, most people would think 'it is I' pedantic in talk, and 'it is me' improper in writing.

What calls more for examination is the practice of using *I* for *me* in combination with some noun or other pronoun, e.g. 'between you and I', 'let you and I go'. Why this has become so prevalent is not easy to say. Perhaps it comes partly from an excess of zeal in correcting the opposite error. When Mrs Elton said 'Neither Mr Suckling nor me had ever any patience with them', and Lydia Bennet 'Mrs Foster and me are such friends', they were guilty of a vulgarism that was, no doubt, common in Jane Austen's day, and is not unknown today. One might suppose that this mistake was corrected by teachers of English in our schools with such ferocity that their pupils are left with the conviction that such combinations as *you and me* are in all circumstances ungrammatical. But that will not quite do. It might explain a popular broadcaster's saying 'that's four to Margaret and I', but it cannot explain why Shakespeare wrote: 'All debts are cleared between you and I'.

It is the combination of oneself with someone else that proves fatal. The official who wrote: 'I trust that it will be convenient to you for my colleague and I to call upon you next Tuesday' would never, if he had been proposing to come alone, have written 'I trust that it will be convenient to you for I to call upon you … ' A sure and easy way of avoiding this blunder is to ask oneself what case the personal pronoun would have been in – would it have been *I* or *me* – if it had stood alone. It should remain the same in partnership as it would have been by itself.

(p. 198-199)

### The split infinitive

The well-known grammarians' rule against splitting an infinitive means that nothing must come between *to* and the verb. It is a bad name, as was pointed out by Jespersen, a grammarian as broadminded as he was erudite.

> This name is bad because we have many infinitives without *to*, as 'I made him go'. *To* therefore is no more an essential part of the infinitive than the definite article is an essential part of a nominative, and no one would think of calling *the good man* a split nominative.

It is a bad rule too; it increases the difficulty of writing clearly and makes for ambiguity by inducing writers to place adverbs in unnatural and even misleading positions.

> A recent visit to Greece has convinced me that the modern Englishman fails completely to recognise that….
>
> Some of the stones … must have been of such a size that they failed completely to melt before they reached the ground.

Does the modern Englishman completely fail to recognise, or does he fail to completely recognise? Did the hailstones completely fail to melt, or did they fail to completely melt? The

reader has to guess and he ought never to have to guess. In these two examples the context shows that the right guess for one will be the wrong guess for the other.

Nor is this all. The split infinitive taboo, leading as it does to the putting of adverbs in awkward places, is so potent that it produces an impulse to put them there even though there is not really any question of avoiding a split infinitive. I have myself been taken to task by a correspondent for splitting an infinitive because I wrote 'I gratefully record'. He was, no doubt, under the influence of the taboo to an exceptional extent. But sufferers from the same malady in a milder form can be found on every hand. We cannot doubt that the writer of the sentence 'they appeared completely to have adjusted themselves to it' put the adverb in that uncomfortable position because he thought that to write 'to have completely adjusted' would be to split an infinitive. The same fear, probably subconscious, may also be presumed to account for the unnatural placing of the adverb in: 'So tangled is the web that I cannot pretend for a moment that we have succeeded entirely in unweaving it.' In this there is no possibility of splitting an infinitive, because there is no infinitive. But the split infinitive-bogy is having such a devastating effect that people are beginning to feel that it must be wrong to put an adverb between any auxiliary and any part of a verb, or between any preposition and any part of a verb.

The infinitive can be split only by inserting a word or words between *to* and the word which, with *to*, forms the infinitive of the verb. 'To fully understand' is a split infinitive. So is 'to fully have understood'; but 'to have fully understood' is not.

In the first edition of *Plain Words* I wrote of the rule against the split infinitive:

> Still, there is no doubt that the rule at present holds sway, and on my principle the official has no choice but to conform; for his readers will almost certainly attribute departures from it to ignorance of it, and so, being moved to disdain of the writer, will not be 'affected precisely as he wishes'.

A friend whose opinion I value has reproached me for this, making no secret of his view that I am little better than a coward. I ought, he tells me, to have the courage of my convictions. I ought to say about the split infinitive, as I said about the 'inanimate whose', that it is right for the official to give a lead in freeing writers from this fetish. The farthest I ought to allow myself to go along the road of safety first is, according to him, to say that it is judicious for an official to avoid splitting whenever he can do so without sacrificing clarity, ease, and naturalness of expression. But rather than make that sacrifice he should resolutely split.

My friend may be right. Rebels will find themselves in good company. Here is an example of a good literary craftsman goaded into apologetic rebellion against this tyranny:

> As for Spotted fat, that prudent animal (whom to Go-go now proceeded to condignly beat till ordered to desist) had swum straight ashore without the slightest effort.

Having written this sentence his book *On the Eves of the World,* Reginald Farrer appended the footnote:

> I have never yet, I believe, split an infinitive in my life; here, for the first time in my experience, I fancy the exigencies of rhythm and meaning do really compel me.

Bernard Shaw was emphatically on the side of the rebels. In 1892 he wrote to the *Chronicle*:

> If you do not immediately suppress the person who takes it upon himself to lay down the law almost every single day in your columns on the subject on literary composition, I will give upthe *Chronicle.* The man is a pedant, an ignoramus, an idiot and a self-advertising duffer. … Your fatuous specialist … is now beginning to rebuke 'second rate' newspapers for using such phrases such as 'to

suddenly go' and 'to boldly say'. I ask you, Sir, to put this man out … without interfering with his perfect freedom of choice between 'to suddenly go' and 'to go suddenly', and 'suddenly to go'….Set him adrift and try an intelligent Newfoundland dog in his place.*

But the most vigorous rebel could hardly condone splitting so resolute as the crescendo of this lease:

> The tenant hereby agrees:
> (i) to pay the said rent;
> (ii) to properly clean all the windows;
> (iii) to at all times properly empty all closets
> (iv) to immediately any litter or disorder shall have been made by him or for his purpose on the staircase or landings or any other part of the said building or garden remove the same.

* Quoted in Grant Richard' *Author Hunting* (Hamish Hamilton 1938)

(p. 218-220)

## The placement of *only*

Adverbs sometimes get awkwardly separated from the words they qualify. 'They should be so placed in a sentence as to make it impossible to doubt which word or words they are intended to affect.' If they affect an adjective or past participle, or other adverb, their place is immediately in front of it (*accurately placed, perfectly clear*). If they affect another part of a verb, or a phrase, they may be in front or behind. It is usually a matter of emphasis : *he came soon* emphasises his promptitude; *he soon came* emphasises his coming.

The commonest causes of adverbs going wrong are the fear, real or imaginary, or (sic!) splitting an infinitive (see pp. 218-20) and the waywardness of the adverbs *only* and *even. Only* is a capricious word. It is much given to deserting its post and taking its place next to the verb, regardless of what it qualifies. It is more natural to say 'he only spoke for ten minutes' than 'he spoke for only ten minutes'. The sport of pillorying misplaced *onlys* has a great fascination for some people, and *only*-snooping seems to have become as popular a sport with some purists as split-infinitive-snooping was a generation ago. A recent book, devoted to exposing the errors of diction in contemporary writers, contained several examples such as:

> He had only been in England for six weeks since the beginning of the war.
> […]

These incur the author's censure. By the same reasoning he would condemn Sir Winston Churchill for writing in *The Gathering Storm*:

> Statesmen are not called upon only to settle easy questions.

Fowler took a different view. Of a critic who protested against 'he only died a week ago', Fowler wrote:

> There speaks one of those friends from whom the English language may well pray to be saved, one of the modern precisians who have more zeal than discretion …

But it cannot be denied that the irresponsible behaviour of *only* does sometimes create real ambiguity. Take such a sentence as :

> His disease can only be alleviated by a surgical operation.

We cannot tell what this means, and must rewrite it either:

> Only a surgical operation can alleviate his disease (it cannot be alleviated in any other way),

or :

> A surgical operation can only alleviate his disease (it cannot cure it).

Again :

> In your second paragraph you point out that carpet-yarn only can be obtained from India, and this is quite correct.

The writer must have meant 'can be obtained only from India', and ought to have written, or, at the least, 'can only be obtained from India'. What he did write, if not actually ambiguous (for it can hardly be supposed that carpet-yarn is India's only product), is unnatural, and set the reader puzzling for a moment.

So do not take the *only*-snoopers too seriously. But be on the alert. It will generally be safe to put *only* in what the plain man feels to be its natural place. Sometimes that will be its logical position, sometimes not. When the qualification is more important than the positive statement, to bring in the *only* as soon as possible is an aid to being understood; it prevents the reader from being put on a wrong scent. In the sentence 'The temperature will rise above 35 degrees only in the south-west of England', *only* is carefully put in its right logical place. But the listener would have grasped more quickly the picture of an almost universally cold England if the announces had said 'the temperature will only rise above 35 degrees in the south-west of England'. What is even better in such cases is to avoid *only* by making the main statement negative : 'The temperature will not rise above 35 degrees, except in the south-west of England.'

*Even* has a similar habit of getting into the wrong place.

[…]

(p. 169-171)

## Singular *none*

*Attraction*

The verb must agree with the subject, and not allow itself to be attracted into the number of the complement. Modern grammarians will not pass 'the wages of sin is death'. The safe rule for the ordinary writer in sentences such as this is to regard what precedes the verb as the subject and what follows it as the complement, and so to write 'the wages of sin are death' and 'death is the wages of sin'.

A verb some way from its subject is sometimes lured away from its proper number by a noun closer to it, as in :

We regret that assurances given us twelve months ago that a sufficient supply of suitable local labour would be available to meet our requirements has not been fulfilled.

So far as the heating of buildings in permanent Government occupations are concerned….

Sometimes the weight of a plural pushed the verb into the wrong number, even though they are not next to one another :

Thousands of pounds' worth of damage have been done to the apple crop.

In these sentences *has*, *are* and *have* are blunders. So is the common attraction of the verb into the plural when the subject is *either* or *neither* in such sentences as 'Neither of the questions have been answered' or 'Either of the questions were embarrassing'. But in one or two exceptional instances the force of this attraction has conquered the grammarians. With the phrase *more than one* the pull of *one* is so strong that the singular is always used (e.g. 'more than one question was asked'), and owing to the pull of the plural in such a sentence as 'none of the questions were answered' *none* has come to be used indifferently with a singular or plural verb.

(p. 185-186)

## *Different from/to/than*

DIFFERENT

There is good authority for *different to*, but *different from* is today the established usage. *Different than* is not unknown even in *The Times*:

The air of the suburb has quite a different smell and feel at eleven o'clock in the morning or three o'clock in the afternoon than it has at the hours when the daily toiler is accustomed to take a few hurried sniffs at it.

But this is condemned by the grammarians, who would say that *than* in this example should have been *from what*.

(p. 222)

## The Cambridge Guide to English Usage

Pam Peters. 2004. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### *Between you and I/me*

**Between you and me (or I)**

Those who always use **between you and me** have it easy, because it's in line with what the traditional grammarians regard as correct use of pronouns. Yet **between you and I** is certainly used too, and for some people it is the usual formula to highlight a confidential point of conversation. The real issue is whether it should appear in writing.

The phrase **between you and I** has a long history of both use and censure. Literary authors from Shakespeare on confirm its currency, yet it fell foul of C18 grammarians, and their zeal to preserve the remaining case distinctions (nominative/accusative) among the English pronouns. They argued that in *between you and ???*, both pronouns are objects of the preposition, and must therefore be accusative. This makes no difference for *you* but it demands *me* rather than *I* as the second pronoun. Of course, if it were *between me and my dog*, no-one would say or write otherwise. The use of *me* comes naturally then, because it is directly governed by *between*. The *I* probably comes into **between you and I** because it's further away from the governing word.

Other factors may help to foster the use of *I*, such as the fact that the phrase quite often comes immediately before the subject/nominative of a clause, as in:

*Between you and I, they won't be here much longer*. Using I may be a kind of hypercorrection, according to the *Comprehensive Grammar* (1985), based on oversensitivity about using *me* (see further under **me**). The vacillation over *me/I* is symptomatic of shifting case relations among pronouns generally (Wales 1996). But because **between you and I** seems to have become a **shibboleth** (see under that heading), it's to be avoided in writing. In fact a confidential **between you and I/me** is unlikely to occur to anyone writing a formal document, because the impersonal character of the style that goes with it.

(p. 69)

### The split infinitive

**split infinitive**

The "problem" of the split infinitive stems from misconceptions about English infinitives: the assumption they consist of two parts (*to* + the verb itself, as in *to read*), and that the two parts can never be split. In fact English infinitives do not necessarily come with the preceding *to* (see **infinitives**); and **split infinitives** were used for centuries before they became the *bête noire* of C18 and C19 grammarians. Their censure cast long shadows into C20, extended by computer style checkers which can so easily be programmed to pick them up.

Reactions to the split infinitive still beg the question as to what is wrong with it. The answers to that question vary from "It's ungrammatical" to "It's inelegant." The first comment has no basis, as we've seen. The second is often subjective, though individual cases do need to be examined in their own terms. Having an adverbial phrase between the *to* and the verb can make an awkward reading, as in:

*I wanted to above all be near her.*

It reads more smoothly as:

*I wanted above all to be near her.*

Yet there's no alternative place for the adverbial phrase in:

*He wanted to more than match the offer.*

A single-word adverb runs in smoothly enough, especially an intensifier:

*He wanted to really talk to her.*

In some cases, the effort to avoid splitting the infinitive alters the meaning of the sentence. Compare:

*He failed completely to follow the instructions.*

with

*He failed to completely follow the instructions.*

There's little virtue in a sentence which avoids the **split infinitive** so clumsily as to make obvious what the writer was trying not to do:

*The failure adequately to brief the pictorial editor was inexcusable.*

Most usage guides including Fowler (1926) recommend a judicious approach to *splitting infinitives*, and do not endorse the knee-jerk reaction of C19 pedagogues or the latter day computer style checker. The consensus is:

* Don't split an infinitive if the result is an inelegant sentence.
* Do **split infinitives** to avoid awkward wording, to preserve natural rhythm, and especially to achieve the intended emphasis and meaning.

(p. 512-513)

## The placement of *only*

**only**

This puts a spotlight on its neighbours in a sentence. It usually focuses on the one following, and the point of the sentence changes according to where it's placed:

*Only the secretary received the letter.*
(nobody else got one)

*The secretary only received the letter.*
(did not open it)

*The secretary received only the letter.*
(not the cheque)

In conversation the placement of **only** is less critical, because intonation can extend the "spotlight" over several words to the one which matters. (With extended intonation we could make the word order of the second sentence communicate the meaning of the third.) But in writing, **only** must be adjacent to the crucial word or phrase to ensure its full effectiveness. (See further under **information focus**).

[…]

(p. 394)

## Singular *none*

**nobody, no one, no-one and none**

The first three take singular verbs in agreement with them:

*Nobody/ no-one has arrived yet.*

This is only natural, given the singular elements –body and –one. **None** is variable, and may take either singular or plural. Compare:

*None of the mixture is left.*

*None of the ingredients are expensive.*

The plural verb in the second example shows the not untypical *proximity agreement* when the *of*-phrase finishes with a plural noun. (See further under **agreement** sections 3 and 5.) In BNC data the plural occurred in about 1 in 3 examples following a plural noun. Pundits of the past argued against the latter, apart from Fowler (1926), who commented that it was mistake to suppose that **none** "must at all costs be followed by a singular verb." *The Oxford Dictionary* (1989) also notes that **none** as the plural of **no one** is commonly found with a plural verb.

[…]

(p. 375)

## *Different from/to/than*

**different from, different to, and different than**

All three constructions have a long history of use, dating back to C16 and C17. Yet much ink has been spilled over their relative correctness, with insufficient attention to their contexts of use. Consider what you would do in the following:

1a *Bob's approach was different … Jo's.*
(from?/to?/than?)
1b *Bob's had a different approach … Jo.*
2a *Bob's approach was different … what we expected.*
2b *Bob had a different approach … what we expected.*
3a *Bob's approach was different … we expected.*
3b *Bob had a different approach … we expected.*

Whatever you do in the first two pairs, there's a strong chance you will choose *than* in the third pair. This is because sentences 3a and 3b require a conjunction, and *from* and *to* are essentially prepositions. Those who have learned to shun *than* after **different** will avoid it in 3a/b by rewriting them along the lines of 2a/b, where either *from* or *to* can be used. Yet the use of **different than** in sentences like 3a/b is standard in American English, according to *Webster's English Usage* (1989), and widely accepted in British English, according to *Comprehensive Grammar of English* (1985), whenever a clause or its elliptical remnant follows (as in sentences 1b or 3a/b above). Data from the BNC shows multiple examples of *than* preceding *what* in type 2 sentences also. These uses of **different than** are frequent in Canada, according to *Canadian English Usage* (1998), and in Australia (Peters, 1995).

When choosing between **different from** and **different to** for constructions like 1a (with a simple noun phrase following), British writers are most likely to write *from* – by about 6:1, according to the evidence of BNC. For American writers the prime choice is between *from* and *than* which appear in ratio of 4:1 in CCAE. **Different than** is thus not the most frequent collocation even in American English, but it's freely used in constructions like 1a, and probably gaining popularity (Hundt, 1998). Americans make little use of **different to.**

Overall the corpus data confirms that grammatical issues are more important than regional differences, in deciding what to collocate *different* with. Only in the case of 1a (and the use of *to*) is it strictly a matter of British/American divergence.

The etymological arguments used to support **different from** no longer seem so powerful. The fact that *different* embodies the Latin prefix *dis*-("away from") does not require the use of *from* after it, any more than with *averse* (see **adverse or averse**). There are natural English parallels for *to* in collocations such as *compared to* and *similar to,* and for *than* in comparatives such as *better than* or *worse than*. The verb *differ* itself combines with other prepositions/particles, for example *differ with* ("disagree"), and so provides only qualified support for using *from.* **Different from** has no exclusive claim on expressions of comparison. Writers and speakers everywhere use **different than** as well, depending somewhat on the grammatical context.

(p. 153)

## Strictly English

Simon Heffer. 2010. London: Random House Books.

### *Between you and I/me*

Few would be so barbaric that they would write or say "I gave it to *she*" or "the bird flew over *they*", but many are barbaric enough to write "the man to *who* I gave it" when *whom* is required. Indeed, it is in usages such as this that those (and they exist) who argue for the redundancy of *whom* are at their weakest. When using a construction with nouns and pronouns it appears to be second nature to forget that the pronoun must be in the accusative, especially if it comes second after the noun. So we are always reading, or hearing, "between you and I", "she invited John and I", "it was a present to my husband and I" (a solecism for which perhaps we must blame the influence of the Queen, despite Her Majesty's own immaculate grammar), "I sent it to John and she" and so on. If a pronoun is on the receiving end of something after a preposition it has to be in the accusative, however distressingly far it may be from the verb.

(p. 118)

### The split infinitive

The other popular obsession about verbs is the split infinitive. This began with the Latinists, notably Lowth, arguing that since the infinitive was intact in that language, it had better be as intact as possible in our own too. There is no reason in that sense why this should apply in English. However, the division of *to* from its verb was seized on by the Fowlers, correctly in my view, as inelegant. This rational observation carries more weight than a dubious precept such as Lowth's. It is hard to see why the phrase "to boldly go" is any less direct or forceful than "to go boldly" or "boldly to go". The meaning is as clear in any of the three forms as in another; but for the sake of logic and clarity *to* and the verb whose infinity it forms are always best placed next to each other rather than interrupted by an adverb. In nearly 30 years as a professional writer I have yet to find a context in which the splitting of an infinitive is necessary in order to avoid ambiguity or some other obstruction to proper sense. Some writers may feel that complications arise where auxiliary verbs are brought into the phrase: "she used frequently to visit her mother at weekends", or even "she frequently used to visit her mother at weekends", will always seem to some writers more problematical and unnatural than "she used to frequently visit…". However, the principle is the same as with the present tense, and a correct usage with an auxiliary is just as easy to grasp as one without one. When dealing with the passive infinitive, such as in the sentence "she knew what it was like to be overlooked", the infinitive would be split by the entirely unidiomatic "she knew what it was like to repeatedly be overlooked". There is nothing wrong with "to be repeatedly overlooked" (or, for that matter, "to be overlooked repeatedly"). What is stylistically important is that the elements *to be* are not separated.

(p. 62-63)

## The placement of *only*

One of the most important questions of word order arises when the word *only* comes into play. *Only* should be positioned as close as possible to the word it qualifies, otherwise it will qualify a word the writer does not intend it to. “She only went to the house to see her friend” means that seeing her friend was the sole purpose of her visit. “She went only to the house to see her friend” means that she went nowhere other than the house to see the friend. “She went to the house only to see her friend” means that when at the house she engaged in no activity other than seeing her friend. “She went to the house to see only her friend” means that she went there to see her friend and nobody else. “She went to the house to see her only friend” means that the unfortunate woman has but one friend. This is a relatively straightforward example; in sentences with longer clauses or a multiplicity of clauses the positioning of *only* is fraught with even more dangers.

(p. 93-94)

## Singular *none*

One of the most common mistakes in writing or in speech is a variant of “none of us are free tonight”. The pronoun ***none*** is singular. It derives from the old English negation of *one* and means “not one”. Therefore one writes “none of us *is* free tonight”, “none of us *was* there”, “none of us *has* done that”, and so on. The dictionary now says that the use in the plural is common. That does not mean it is correct. Partridge, writing in the 1940s, also sanctioned this usage in certain instances, but in quoting a usage by Dryden reflects the dictionary’s view that the usage in the plural was common from the 17th to the 19th centuries, but has since been rectified. Partridge quotes a correspondent who dismisses the singular *none* as a “superstition”, claims *no* is a contraction of it, and argues therefore that the plural usage is acceptable. The dictionary declares the etymology of *no* to be a variant of *none.* That does not settle the point about its usage, however. There was enough precedent before the 17th century, never mind the time of the creation of the alleged “superstition”, of *none’s* being singular. So it should stay.

*None* is also an adverb whose usage is not subject to this error – as in “he is none the worse for his ordeal” or “they were none the wiser having read his book”.

Other confusions of number include resistance to the correct “one in five is” and the like, when one now routinely reads “one in five are”. It is easy to see how this mistake comes about: the writer or speaker knows that there are a number of groups of five, resulting in a multiplicity of ones that form a plural. That is not the point. It remains “one in five is”; the noun *one* is always and forever singular. If that is unbearable to some minds, then their owners should feel free to say instead that “20 per cent are”.

Where one is describing one of a group that has a common characteristic, any verb must refer to the group and not to the individual item. So one would write ‘he was one of those men who *refuse* to be beaten’ rather than ‘he was one of those men who *refuses* to be beaten’, as the relative clause describes the group and not the individual. The same would apply to “it was another of those things that *make* you mad” rather than “*makes* you mad”.

***Neither*** is singular when it refers to a pair of individual people or things, but has to be plural when it refers to a pair of groups. It must also be followed by *nor*, never by *or* or *and*. So one would write “neither John nor Mary was at the funeral” but “neither the Smiths nor

the Browns were at the wedding": the latter for the obvious reason that each of the nouns is plural. Whether referring to individuals or groups, it can only refer to one in two. If there were three or more people, or groups, then use *none*, remembering to use a singular verb: "none of John, Mary or Jane was at the funeral," or "none of the Smiths, Browns or Whites was there": the singular is correct with the groups as, in logic, not only are the entire families not present, neither is any single member of them.

That last clause raises a point worth emphasising: that where individual alternatives (or more than two individual things or persons) are conjoined by an *or*, the verb remains singular. It would be plural only when groups are listed, as in "men or women are invited to apply".

(p. 46-48)

## *Different from/to/than*

Here are some of the most common mistakes with the choice of prepositions: they are often made when a demotic usage seeps into the consciousness of supposedly educated people. A person is absorbed *in* a task, not by it; but liquid may be absorbed *by* a sponge. One acquiesces *in* something, not with it, and one connives *at* something, not in it. One aims *at* something, not for it. One becomes angry *with* someone, not at him. One is ashamed *of* bad behaviour, not by it. A decision is *between* one thing *and* another, not one thing or another. One is bored *by* or *with* something, never of it. Something is different *from* something else, not to it or, even more abominable, than it.
(p. 118-119)

*Than* is often to be found not far from *as* or *so,* and often being used wrongly. The most notorious is "twice as many visitors came to Britain than last year"; "as last year" is correct. *Than* has very limited legitimate usage: it is correct in a comparison (and in comparison-equivalents, such as *rather than* or *sooner than*), or in construction with *other* ("other than Smith, they could not think of anyone to ask") and *otherwise* ("it was safer to do it that way than otherwise"). *Different than* is an abomination, and one does not prefer to do something *than* to do something else; one prefers to do something *rather than* to do something else. So "I prefer to swim than to ride" is wrong; "I prefer to swim rather than to ride" is correct but prolix. It is better, if possible, to use nouns: "I prefer swimming to riding".

(p. 125)